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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 001058

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: PM TARICEANU/DEFMIN PROPOSE IRAQ TROOP WITHDRAWAL;
PRESIDENT BASESCU REAFFIRMS COMMITMENTS TO IRAQ, GWOT

Classified By: DCM Mark Taplin for Reasons 1.4 (a), (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Calin-Popescu Tariceanu unexpectedly announced June 29 in a press conference that he would "support the initiative" of Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu to request the Supreme Council for National Defense (CSAT) to withdraw Romania's troops from Iraq. Tariceanu made his statement shortly after an extraordinary meeting of the National Liberal Party's (PNL) senior leadership. (Note. Tariceanu is PNL President and Atanasiu is a long-standing PNL operative, as well as Tariceanu ally. End Note.) During his press conference, Tariceanu stated that Romania would continue to "assume all of its responsibilities as a NATO member" and take part in NATO, EU and UN Missions. According to press reports, Tariceanu cited, as justification for the proposed withdrawal, "the negative popular impact" of a troop commitment in Iraq along with the decisions of other European countries to withdraw their troops from Iraq. Tariceanu declared that Romania should "reorient itself toward domestic priorities." Press reports quoted Tariceanu as saying the decision to withdraw "was discussed with our U.S. and British partners." In a separate statement to the press, DefMin Atanasiu declared that a total of 890 troops would eventually be withdrawn from Iraq. Both the PM and DefMin cited the significant cost of maintaining troops in Iraq.

¶2. (C) PNL Senator Adrian Cioroianu, who participated in the PNL's June 29 "extraordinary meeting," told EmbOff that the DefMin presented a memorandum to the PNL leadership recommending a withdrawal from Iraq, but also an increased contribution in Afghanistan. Cioroianu opined that the PNL's decision would "not please the U.S." but was in line, he claimed, with EU policy. He predicted that the CSAT would support the call for a withdrawal from Iraq. However, another influential PNL MP, Deputy Cristian Adomnитеi, said he was surprised by the PNL leadership's decision and did not support it. He noted that he had been unable to attend the last minute meeting of the PNL leadership. He predicted that the CSAT would reject the call for a withdrawal from Iraq. Other PNL members told PolChief the hastily organized meeting had taken them by surprise.

Basescu: "We will Continue Our Commitment to the GWOT"

¶3. (C) An outraged President Basescu told the Ambassador in a June 29 phone conversation that the CSAT would reject the call for a troop withdrawal from Iraq. He underscored that "a decision like this cannot be made by one party." Basescu stressed to the Ambassador that Romania would continue its commitment to the GWOT. He also stated that Tariceanu's announcement had come as a surprise, as "no one in my Administration or anyone in the Foreign Ministry was

contacted" before the PM's announcement. According to the British DCM, Basescu made the same points in a phone conversation with the British Ambassador. The British DCM refuted Tariceanu's inference that there had been discussions about possible withdrawals among coalition partners with HMG and stated that the UK Embassy would issue a press release to that effect June 29.

¶14. (C) Foreign Minister Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu told the Ambassador in a June 29 phone call that he was "not surprised but I am appalled." He emphasized that the PNL's "decision was taken without consulting either me or the Ministry." Ungureanu stressed that Basescu would convene the CSAT on June 29; he was rushing back to the capital from Iasi to take part. Ungureanu underscored his opposition to the PNLQ unilateral action, adding "I'm putting my position on the line."

Mixed Political Reaction

¶15. (C) Democratic Party (PD) President and Cluj Mayor Emil Boc, a longtime Basescu ally, publicly described the PNL decision as a "political error...lacking responsibility." He predicted that the PM's call for a troop withdrawal "will seriously affect Romania's credibility abroad." Interior Minister Vasilie Blaga, also a PD member, stated publicly that he was "surprised about this decision and all I can say is we will not betray our friends."

¶16. (C) Senate Defense Committee President and opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) member George Cristian Maior told TV reporters that any decision to withdraw forces from Iraq should be "prepared and taken only after consultations with our allies in Iraq." Noting that the PSD had previously called for a timetable for troop withdrawal from Iraq, Maior

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characterized the PM's unexpected announcement as a reflection of political tensions between him and Basescu. In a separate discussion with PolOff, Maior stated that the PSD has "always supported a moderate position, based on the continuity of Romania's commitments." Maior continued that discussions of a "timetable" could be appropriate but that "this sudden measure was not in the interests of Romania." Maior stated that the PNL's surprise announcement was "not fair" to the President, who had been taken by surprise, but was aimed at gaining partisan political advantage for the PNL in light of recent polling figures which show low public support for Romania's troop presence in Iraq. According to Maior, both the PM and the DefMin had, as of several hours after the announcement, still failed to speak with Basescu.

¶17. (C) Leaders of the small Conservative Party (PC), which has feuded with its coalition partner Basescu, expressed support for the PM's announcement. Ethnic Hungarian party (UDMR) leaders confirmed to EmbOff that PM Tariceanu had consulted with UDMR President Marko Bela and the UDMR supported the PNL's call for a withdrawal.

¶18. (C) Comment. Basescu is President of the Supreme Council for National Defense (CSAT) and Tariceanu is the Vice President. The other ten CSAT members are DefMin Atanasiu, Interior Minister Blaga, FM Ungureanu, CHOD General Eugen Badalan, National Security Advisor Sergiu Medar, the Justice Minister, the Minister of Economy and Trade, the Finance Minister, and the heads of the internal and external intelligence services. It is highly unlikely that a majority of CSAT members would support the PM-DefMin call for a withdrawal. Significantly, CSAT decisions have traditionally been based on a consensus decision, not majority vote per se, and members disagreeing with the consensus have abstained. Many observers and analysts characterize the PM's precipitate call for a withdrawal from Iraq as a gambit in his escalating political conflict with Basescu rather than a thought-out geopolitical strategy, illustrated by the fact that the President, Foreign Minister and Interior Minister were all

blindsided by the announcement. The Prime Minister's staff reached out to the Ambassador this afternoon, to suggest a meeting, emphasizing its wish to put the PM's position "in the proper perspective" and insisting the news did not "represent a dramatic situation."

TAUBMAN